

The Theory and Practice of Education as seen through Western Eyes and its relevance to the East

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Introduction

This paper is a result of thinking about education and training for a number of years. Firstly during my fifteen years in industry, training operators, supervisors and managers and secondly and perhaps more intensively during my nine years in higher education.

The first part considers education from a philosophical viewpoint. From this relationships between theory and practice are considered. Similarities between management and education practices are used to highlight the effect cultural differences can have on meeting desired goals. Consideration is given to the idea of a western model of education being valid to the east. The author's conclusion is that not only are the existing models unsuitable for the East but for the West as well.

Theory of education

From a philosophical point there has been much discussion as to whether there is or can be such a thing as 'a theory of education'. Moore (1971), O'Connor (1973), Hudson (1966), Hirst (1973) argue at length on the parameter of a theory considering attributes a theory might have. Can it be practical, prescriptive, explanatory; should it be refutable? Moore in particular considers the theories of education of Plato, Rousseau, Mill and Dewey to be general theories, and uses their work to support his argument that there can be a theory of education and that this theory can be classified as a prescriptive one. I believe that it is possible to use the word 'theory' in the prescriptive sense, and that in general when theories are discussed, the participants accept the sense in which it is used. The domino theory is understood I believe to be a prescriptive theory. In Collins New English Dictionary a theory is defined as:

an explanation of the general principles of an art and a science, as distinct from the practice and execution of it

For me the crucial words here are, 'art' and 'distinct from the practice and execution of it'. As the philosophers that I have studied appear not to be able to agree on what a theory should be, I propose to use the meaning above, in this paper.

Education

There are many articles on education that have been written in the West and the East - nearly all assume that there is some common understanding of what education is. Helu (1980) raises the same point in considering that there was a lack of interest in theory stemming from the modern insistence 'on getting things done'. I feel then it is important to clarify what I understand education should be as defined by philosophers of education.

Peters (1967) defines education by saying that:

that criteria explicit in central cases of education are ...

- that education implies the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who become committed to it;*
- that education must involve knowledge and understanding and some kind of cognitive perspective which are not inert;*
- that education at least rules out some procedures of transmission on the grounds that they lack willingness and voluntariness on the part of the learner.*

He summarises the main criteria of education under the aspects which are to be satisfied by an 'educated' person.

An educated person is one whose form of life, as exhibited in his conduct, the activities to which he is committed, his

judgements and feelings are thought to be desirable ... Whatever he is trained to do he must have knowledge, not just knack, and an understanding of principles. His form of life must also exhibit some mastery of forms of thought and awareness which are not harnessed purely to utilitarian or vocational purposes or completely confined to one mode ... His knowledge and under-standing must not be inert either in the sense that they make no difference to his general view of the world, his actions within it or in the sense that they involve no concern for the standards imminent in forms of thought and awareness, as well as the ability to attain them.

From the above definitions and ideas concerning education and the educated person, I believe one can tease a number of important characteristics necessary for education to be taking place. These are:

knowledge, voluntariness, active,	understanding, worthwhile, transformation.	willingness, wholeness,
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The concepts above are discussed at different lengths. Understanding and willingness are concepts that all philosophers that I have read appear to accept as part of education and thus elucidate very little in their discussions. Voluntariness is the opposite. I can find little or no discussion on this topic so I take it that not all philosophers agree on the voluntariness of education. If so, what implications does this have for the British education system or systems that prescribe what the student must do?

To be classified as education the process must be worthwhile. The question here is worthwhile for whom? This concept is very open to interpretation, depending upon who is considering the worthiness of the process. It is affected by time and culture. What seems worthwhile now may in the future be lost (Dray, 1978) and what is seen as worthwhile by one culture may be viewed in the opposite way by another (O'Hara, 1983). Tom Kaye (Kanbur & Hau'ofa, 1984) in his article on 'Education for what in the South Pacific' defines education as worthwhile learning. He also considers in this same

article that there is a disagreement between governments and parents as to what is worthwhile with respect to formal education in the South Pacific.

Wholeness can also be interpreted to mean a number of things. Peters (1967) considers it thus:

A carpenter could well be an educated man, even though he spends most of his day on carpentry. He would have some depth of understanding of carpentry, not just know-how, and his understanding and sensitivities would not be limited to his carpentry.

It would appear that the last two criteria for an educated person are closely linked. Peters believes that a person who has been taught, 'educated', but this education does not affect his/her life in some active way can be considered as un-educated. For education to occur there must be by implication some transformation.

Knowledge is a concept that is open to great discussion and has large interpretations placed on it. Langford (1968) considers that this concept will be more easily achieved if the use of 'I know' is considered. Hirst (1973) considers that there are a number of forms of knowledge which are not mere collections of information but complex ways of understanding the world around us. Peters considers knowledge in a similar way but explains his concept more clearly:

the knowledge requirement built into education ... has implications. This is an attitudinal aspect. By this I mean that the knowledge which a man must possess to qualify as being educated must be built into his way of looking at things. It cannot be merely inert. It is possible for a man

Editor's Note: I apologise for the sexist language in the quotations!

to know a lot of history, in the sense that he can give correct answers to the questions in classrooms and in examinations, without developing a historical sense. For instance he might fail to connect his knowledge of the Industrial Revolution with what he sees when visiting Manchester (cotton factories) or the Welsh Valleys (coal mines). We might describe such a man as a 'knowledgeable', but we would never describe him as 'educated'; for 'education' implies that a man's outlook is transformed by what he knows.

This latter definition I find very challenging. Many institutions of higher education that I have been associated with have described themselves as providing 'knowledge' to students. Others don't even state what they do!

Education theory

Considering the previous points, one could view the theory of education as being a proposal that 'tells us what we should be doing to educate our people'. O'Connor (1973) states that education "consists mainly of muddle, twaddle and quacksalving" due to an inadequate theoretical background. Phillips (1971) considers what educational theories are not and appears to argue at length, supporting O'Connor's view, that theory which is used in the natural sciences is inapplicable to education. Phillips appears to argue more for a statement of principles of education rather than a 'Theory of education', suggesting that this is an area where both O'Connor and Hirst might agree. Boberg (1985) hints at a similar view when in a discussion on educational theory and practice he quotes Downey thus, "there can be no practice without principles of some kind".

Moore (1974) believes that a general theory of education must logically begin with an aim, an assumption of value and continues to say that the aim is not to produce guardians to rule the state, or the natural person but an educated person. This 'educated person', according to Moore, is improved by education, has acquired certain skills and knowledge and attitudes generally regarded as worth having; s/he has some grasp and understanding of what s/he has learned, and his/her life is to some extent enhanced in

consequence. This would tie in with my earlier attempt to define education and from this I would suggest that we are looking for an acceptable definition of education which then will provide the basis of our aims when we practise education.

Educational practice

'It's all right in theory but no good in practice'. How many times has this been heard? Is it an appropriate comment on the theory and practice of education? Shaw (1981) compares educational practice with medical practice and argues that the latter must be directed to improve health and so the former should improve one's education. Terhart and Drerup's (1981) explanation of practice is more of a description, although it tends to restrict itself to teaching. It is difficult and tortuous to attempt to illustrate and indicate what educational practice is and I am forced to consider that it is impossible to study the practice of education without reference to the theory. Dearden (1980) is of the same opinion:

educational theory would be the result of an endeavour to understand that practice which theory itself must first pick out as educational

With this in mind I will move on to look at the relationship between theory and practice.

The relationship between Theory and Practice of Education in Britain

Shaw (1981), considers that theories play an enormous part in the creation and modification of educational practices and as such says we can reject out of hand that there is no relationship between educational theory and practice. The questions are: what is this relationship? is it beneficial or not? Dearden (1980) believes that changes may reasonably be expected from the application of theory to practice in education. He states that different branches of theory will have different strengths and weaknesses depending, for example on the level at which decisions are made. But it is reasonable, says Dearden, to hope that there will be gains in respect of at least some of the following:

- 1) *a deeper grasp of the nature of learning and of the implications of various teaching strategies;*
- 2) *a more adequate and considered set of educational values, with an appreciation of their curricular and methodological implications;*
- 3) *a deeper understanding of the background or context which provides the setting for the educational practice;*
- 4) *a certain imaginative liberation through seeing the actual distanced, and thus revealed as only one possibility;*
- 5) *a degree of reconstruction of ideas through a critical reconsideration of their truth and adequacy, and hence greater intellectual control over practice.*

Dearden explains that these theoretical beliefs are objects of a reasonable hope but they cannot be transformed into specific behavioural predictions. They must take their place in a complex ecology of other beliefs, some of which he states may be even beyond recall.

Many writers appear to agree that the theory and practice of education fit loosely together. There is a common consent that there is a theory of education and that this theory relates in general terms to the practice. Dearden puts theory and practice into perspective when he says:

... granted that we have some genuine piece of theory that is pragmatically relevant, still these theoretical beliefs have to take place in a complex ecology of other beliefs ...

Whilst I agree that it is possible to have a theory of education that should help educators practise their profession, I am forced to disagree that this appears to work in practice in Britain. My argument is based on the assumption that a theory of education would include within it some concept of free will. As I believe that the English system of 'education' is based on coercion, I cannot see that it relates to any theory that I am aware of.

Another objection I have against the idea of a theory of education which contains values is that these values by their nature are culture bound. Do we British, with our colonial views, want to force everyone to be educated to our theory? Or can we consider that our views of education are just that, they are guidelines for us to work to? By this I mean that we would believe rightly or wrongly that these guidelines were the most suitable for our culture, for the maintenance of our industrialised society, but not necessarily for other cultures.

However, my major objection is aroused by a quotation many years old, one I believe explains and defines clearly what education should be.

In 1832, John Stuart Mill published an essay on 'On Genius' (Kingsley, 1962) in which he criticised the education of his day and compared it adversely to the education of the ancients. His essay is, according to Landy and Perry (1973), one of the most powerful and relevant criticisms of pure formalism that they know. He praises Greek education thus:

Education then consisted not in giving what is called knowledge, that is, grinding down other men's ideas to a convenient size, and administering them in the form of cram - it was a series of exercises to form the thinking faculty itself, that the mind, being active and vigorous, might go forth and know. The studies of the closet were combined with, and were intended as a preparation for the pursuits of an active life. This was the education to form great states-men, great orators, great warriors, great poets, great architects, great sculptors, great philosophers; because, once for all, it formed men, and not mere knowledge-boxes; and the men being men, had minds, and could apply them to the work, whatever it might be, which circumstances had given them to perform.

By contrast, he complains,

modern education is all cram ... The world already knows everything, and it only has to tell it to its children. Is it

any wonder that the ten centuries of England and France cannot produce as many illustrious names as the hundred and fifty years of little Greece?

The remedy as Mills sees it, is:

the distinct recognition that the end of education is not to teach, but to fit the mind for learning from its own conscious-ness and observation; that we have occasions for this power under ever-varying circumstances, for which no routine or rule of thumb can possibly make provision. Let all cram be ruthlessly discarded. Let each person be made to feel that in other things he may believe upon trust - if he finds trustworthy authority - but that in the line of peculiar duty, and in the line of the duties common to all men, it is his business to know. Let the feelings of society cease to stigmatize independent thinking, and divide its censure between a lazy self-conceit of a half-thinker, who rushes to his conclusions without taking the trouble to understand the thoughts of other men. Were all this done, there would be no complaint of any want of genius in modern times. But when will that hour come? Though it come not at all, yet is it not less your duty and mine to strive for it and first to do what is certainly and absolutely in our power, to realise it in our persons?

Education and Management Practice

If I use Mills' statement as a guide, proposal or theory of education then I have to admit that modern western education appears to have lost its way. Mackie (1981) on autonomy in student thinking, gives me the impression that thinking is not promoted by examinations and is reserved for life after college when she states:

many tertiary students lack confidence in thinking as a result of secondary school efforts to organise them

through examinations. Many teachers do this in good faith, believing that they are helping their pupils in a competitive world. This policy is often counter productive. Thinking is a major work skill in almost any employment, and in obtaining employment.

Many organisations put together educational programs without really being clear what education is. There is a vast amount written about the philosophical underpinning of education and a vast amount of research into educational practice, teaching and learning. Unfortunately there appears a dearth of material linking the two. If I reflect on my area of work(management), I find a number of similarities with organisational management behaviour in western companies, particularly those in manufacturing.

Many western manufacturing companies make products or provide services by processing inputs to outputs without having clear organisational goals. It is believed that the inability in relating corporate goals to operational activities has contributed to Britain's poor performance compared to Japan and other countries. Students carrying out action research in Scotland informed me that a large number of managers did not know what the corporate goals or missions were. Some managers even said to students "If you find out what our corporate mission is, please tell me". The companies with clear mission statements were usually Japanese or American. The British companies were too busy doing things and they didn't have time to think! Similar comments were made to me in a British educational establishment. I had requested a meeting to discuss the direction of the management group that I was working with. The group leader replied: "We don't have time to discuss these issues, just get on and teach!"

Even companies that have identified their goals and have corporate objectives, often just pay lip service to them. A number of companies that I have done consultancy work with, profess 'quality first' but continue to use their old control systems which emphasise output.

In 1984 I started work at a Scottish Central Institution and a few months later I was involved in a conference on 'New Approaches to Learning'

(Percival, 1984). This conference gave a direction to the organisation's objectives, suggesting that new approaches, which were competence based, would in turn lead to better educated students at a lower cost. The members of the conference were informed that 'the next institutional review would be a suitable occasion for appraising the success of the College in encouraging new styles of student learning'. During the next five years much was written on these and other appropriate methods of learning but little was done. And this only by a few who were prepared to risk the wrath of members of a Board of Study intent on continuing doing what they had always done.

Further comparisons

The analogy doesn't stop there, industry in the west, America, UK and much of Europe was concerned in the 1970's, with maximising output. Quality was measured and controlled at the end of the process. Similarly western educational institutions appear to be concerned with maximising their outputs and measuring the results at the end. Quality control is carried out at the end of the production process where the product is graded, marked for reprocessing or rejected. Limited feedback is done at this stage, the student is informed of the grade but not in sufficient detail to deal with his problem effectively. The time between the action and feedback is often so great that it is almost impossible to control the processing.

IBM were seriously concerned about a three-week lag between processing and control and took steps to reorganise their organisation to give more or less instant feedback. This involved a change in their conceptual view of how people might behave. They gave the control to the people doing the job. Control systems in education are often yearly or half yearly and there appears to be little evidence of change. Whilst it may be argued that the control is often at shorter intervals, class tests, assignments etc., these controls are often different from the final control, which is used for grading purposes.

Now we come to the major difference between manufacturing companies and educational establishments in the West. The former have been forced by economic circumstances to modify their behaviour. More than modify,

they have been forced to change their conceptual viewpoint in relation to achieving their objectives. These companies imported the concepts of Just-in-Time and Total Quality Control from Japan. These concepts were seen as central in the Japanese strategy of market dominance (Schonberger, 1982) and were not tools for senior and middle management but gave the workforce the power and authority to make first class products every time, on time.

British and US companies first became aware of the impact of these approaches in 1977 (Pilditch, 1987) and when the realism set in they attempted to copy as the Japanese had copied the West before. However there are two noticeable differences. Whilst the Japanese took on the newly imported ideas with some sense of urgency, the British are still too busy. Thirteen years later there is only a small percentage of companies in the UK that have changed their attitudes completely. Some make half attempts, others delay, and the rest don't have the time to think about it. The second difference is that the Japanese are not standing still; the gap in performance increases, as Japanese companies continually think about what they are doing and try out new ideas. Their success is phenomenal; over eighty percent of the world market in cameras, watches, video and FAXs, is held by the Japanese (Pilditch, 1987). That means that the US, Germany, Britain, Italy, Switzerland etc. share less than twenty percent. Is it any wonder that the Japanese own nine of the world's ten largest banks, judged on assets?

Theory and Practice in the East

Little appears to have been written on the theory and practice of eastern education. Former colonial countries like India I believe are too influenced by their western colonists to give a true view of the system they would have freely chosen. It is interesting to consider the Vietnamese writer Mguyen Khac Kham (1967) in his book 'An introduction to Vietnamese Culture'. He reflects on Emperor Minh-mang's statement in 1822 in relation to the shortcomings of the current education system at that time.

For long, our examinations have been leading our students to a useless goal. No literature can be fully

developed when it is bound by too old and strict rules. If this is the way in which our people are being educated, then really talented men will become scarce!

Is this not similar to Mills' complaint? If people in the East were thinking about education perhaps they have not lost their ways. Has the ability to think and manage their environment influenced their education system or is it a result of it?

Helu (1980) commented on the success of ancient Greece, stating that whilst their education was totally unrelated to their needs, the country still had a period of great prosperity. This he hinted was a result of the way they learnt as he considered that the process of education was more important than the content. I would agree with this, but often organisations get hung up on content particularly in developing countries where they appear to have less confidence so that they tend to copy western models or are told by western academics what they should do.

Eastern Culture

In A Guide to Japanese Culture, edited by Murakami Hyoe and Edward G. Seidensticker, Ishida Eiichiro considers that cultural idiosyncrasies are common to India, Indonesia, Okinawa, Japan and Korea where life is centred upon a planting technique, formal observances related to rice planting and an animistic concept of the origins of life. He also considers that the secret of vigour of the Japanese people may well lie in a continuing willingness to import foreign culture into circumstances of racial and cultural endogamy.

I have used the Japanese as an example of a country that has had the least forced western culture on it. Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, India, Korea and the Pacific Islands have all had a heavy dose of invited western influence. Although, as I will show later, this does not necessarily mean that these countries have lost their roots. However, for this reason and from a practical viewpoint, (there is more material on the Japanese), I have chosen Japan.

I think it is important to consider Japanese ways of thinking and behaving

because I believe that the eastern attitude more readily facilitates education as I see it. In 'The Way of Thinking of the Japanese People', Nakaura Hajime (1962) states that:

a spirit of fellowship and tolerance deeply permeated the subjective awareness of the individual Japanese... The Japanese were unable to abhor offenders... In ancient times there were no truly criminal penalties. Crucifixion first appeared in Japan in 1467-1586 and is thought to be the influence of Christianity.

Educational Implications

In terms of education that means people are not chastised for failing, but are helped to improve themselves. This approach provides a central theme for Just-in-time management, which is one of continuous improvement (Neil, G. & O'Hara, 1987). It demands a supportive environment to be established specifically to facilitate learning and improvement. Stewart (1983) sees the same need for a supportive environment for education in his article 'Fijian Education: its special demand'.

Many people from the East have demonstrated a remarkable ability to absorb concepts into their culture readily... "to the Japanese any religion was acceptable provided that it did not disrupt the social order or the laws regulating human relationships" (Hajima, 1962). Masao (1961) also supports this point: "Aspects of Buddhism, Confucianism, shamanism and western thought all live under the same roof." In Indonesia there is a similar situation. The people find it totally acceptable to believe in God, no matter what religion, perhaps changing more frequently than the religious leaders would desire. Conversely, they find it difficult to understand people who profess not to believe in God.

Masoa points out that the Japanese consider that sensitivity is more important than rules. For example, one should know what one's neighbour wants. This has major implications for dealing with customers and for coping with the current western education systems. He considers that they rapidly import western philosophy and thought although it will be in small

bits and fit it to their world view without any thought of its original context. The Japanese take up all philosophy, religion and learning without any reservation, discarding at a later date that which is no longer of any use to them. Masao states that:

This tendency reveals itself in a general aversion to abstract ideologies, in a distrust of deductive reasoning and a dependence on intuition and direct, practical experience, and in a reliance on a critical method that seeks to undermine the credibility of an adversary by exposing his argumentative posturing or inconsistencies in his thought and behaviour rather than by countering his arguments in any rigorously logical fashion.

Ballard (1989) see this as inferior to the western model. She describes a Japanese student as inadequately seeing the explanatory model of approaches to learning. The western idea that there are two ends of a spectrum is the valid view point. Unfortunately orientals see things in a circular manner (anyone learning Judo will be well aware of this) and this gives them a different approach to life. Whilst Ballard accepted that the student was working within a perfectly valid set of norms, she pointed out that he was deficient at western historical analysis. However, after tuition the student was able to adapt and produce work that displayed intellectual analysis.

Whilst Ballard in her paper tries to come to terms with these differences in an attempt to help students cope with western education, she gives the impression that the situation is value free. It is a pity that she does not question the validity of the approach although she hints at this at the end of her paper when she comments that the student can think in two ways. I would doubt this. I believe that the student still maintains his eastern thinking, cloaking this with a performance of western historical analysis. Why should he change when the evidence is that the eastern way is more successful. I think that it is likely that the student's flirtation with western thinking would be to please his superiors; he is doing exactly what the lecturers ask him to do. Of course he is too polite to tell them that their ideas are a load of rubbish!!

What Ballard failed to understand was that she was involved with another culture. She correctly identified that the students wanted to please their mentors and that they wanted to be polite but she didn't connect this with her own reality. If Ballard had made the connection she might have questioned the validity of what she was doing in the first place.

There appear to be major differences in attitudes of peoples with a western world view and an eastern world view. Some of these can be listed as follows:

West	East
care for things	care for people
short term view	long term view
complex systems	simplification
confrontation	harmony
like ideas acceptable	all ideas acceptable

These ideas are so far apart we either accept them or reject them. I am clearly in danger of showing that I am still very much a western thinker, as much as I would like to change. The whole argument is from someone who has a western culture. Attempts to involve eastern people to justify my work are pointless for I have already stated that people from the East try to please other people. Why then should they criticise my work? And even if I got someone to carry out a critical analysis it is probable that they would criticise it in a way that they thought I would like them to!!

Conclusion

Where is all this taking us? My argument is that western education is well off track. The goals have been forgotten and educational institutions are busy producing students. Output is king; very little thought goes into defining corporate goals and designing appropriate educational systems. The comparison with the western manufacturing approach is almost perfect except that it is trying to change and improve what it does.

Eastern countries, particularly Japan, have very clear corporate objectives.

They look for long term returns, for continual improvement. If their work systems are anything to go by then one might surmise that the education systems are similarly designed. Gene Gregory, a professor at Sophia University, Tokyo, believes that education motivation and innovation are the keys to Japanese success (Pilditch, 1987). Merry White (1987) in his book 'Japanese educational challenge: a commitment to children' states:

*this book is based on many years of experience ...
Japanese society is a society committed to children and
education.*

Before 1848 King Rama V of Thailand (Charanyananada, 1986) said:

*... Education must be non-exclusive for all. Therefore I
declare that learning in our country is the most important
thing that I will be involved in.*

My contention is that western countries should look more to the East and perhaps copy the Japanese model. When I say copy, I mean, do what the Japanese and Indonesians do. Be aware of your own culture; take from any society the things that suit you but most of all have clear long-term educational goals. Then design your own systems to help you meet these goals. Remember that the British education system is designed to process people through to university but only 10-20% get there. Eighty percent of the population receive an education that provides them with limited competences when they leave school. This is not only poor use of limited resources, it deprives many from reaching their potential. In the end the whole community suffers. Can you afford to do that?

Reflections

An area that is not covered is the concept of a confrontational society as opposed to a conciliatory society. Since it now seems clear that we live in a world that cannot afford wars and is providing improved standards of living for many people, are societies that are conciliatory more appropriate? And, if this is the case, up on which lines should we design and build our education systems?

I wish to end with an ancient Chinese proverb:

Those who think in weeks, plant grass; those who think in years, plant trees; those who think in centuries, educate people.

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